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Fact Sheet



AMA

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THIS PRACTICE
VIOLENCE-FREE
AN AUSTRALIAN MEDICAL ASSOCIATION



Managing the risks of violence in medical practice

Medical practices occupy a special place in the local community. Doctors care for people when they are sick and the community places a great deal of trust in its local doctor. Despite this positive role, medical practices are not immune from the risks of workplace violence.

Doctors deal with patients from many different backgrounds – with a wide range of conditions. Many medical practices are located in suburbs where the incidence of violence is relatively high. People who visit a practice may be under a great deal of stress, in pain or upset. Their behaviour can be unpredictable and situations can quickly escalate.

Research indicates that more than half of GPs are exposed to work related violence in any 12-month period. This can take many forms including assault, stalking, verbal abuse, threatening behaviour, sexual harassment and property damage.

The impact on people working in the practice

as well as patients can be significant. Beyond physical injury, workplace violence can lead to poor morale, absenteeism, stress symptoms, feelings of decreased competence, substance abuse, avoidance of patients and a loss of job satisfaction.

Violent incidents can also affect workers compensation and general insurance premiums.

All medical practices have a duty under occupational health and safety laws to keep the workplace safe. This duty applies to employees as well as anyone else who enters the workplace.

This kit is designed to provide practical guidance on minimising the risks of workplace violence in medical practice.

Managing the risks of workplace violence

A three-step approach is often used to eliminate or reduce the risks of workplace violence:

- **Risk identification** – identify situations where employees and others may be exposed to the risk of violence,
- **Risk assessment** – prioritise the hazards so that you can deal with the most serious ones first,
- **Risk control** – implement measures to eliminate or reduce the hazard.

Risk Identification

Included with this kit is a DIY checklist to assist medical practices to undertake a risk identification audit. This checklist is generic and designed to cover many different situations.

Not all items on the checklist will be relevant to the circumstances of every medical practice. A common sense approach needs to be followed, based on an assessment of likely risks faced by the practice.

Using the checklist is simple. It highlights potential risk control measures and allows the practice to include details of what further steps it can take to reduce the risks of workplace violence. To ensure that these steps are actioned in a timely fashion, it requires the practice to nominate a timeframe for the completion of various tasks as well as the person(s) responsible. Below is an example of how to complete the checklist.

POTENTIAL RISK CONTROL MEASURE	ACCEPTABLE	DETAIL FURTHER ACTION REQUIRED	NOT APPLICABLE	PERSON(S) RESPONSIBLE	BY WHEN
Comfortable and appropriate seating	No	Replace light plastic chairs with seating that cannot easily be thrown		Practice manager	Mid November
Duress alarm installed	No	Install duress alarms at reception desk, consulting rooms and treatment room		Practice manager	Mid January
Lifts have access control measures			Practice is single storey		

When undertaking risk identification a practice should consider taking the following steps:

- consult with employees, contractors and practice principals,
- conduct a workplace inspection – including consulting rooms,
- speak to local police about what is happening in your local area,
- check incident and injury reports along with records of any workers' compensation claims,
- speak with other practices in the area to establish if they have encountered any particular incidences of violence,
- review your records to see if any patients have become violent in the past, or may present a risk of violence.

Practices should aim to undertake this exercise at least once every twelve months, after a violent incident has occurred, where someone working in the practice raises an issue, or where there has been a significant change in the layout or design of the practice.

■ Risk assessment

When the practice has completed the risk identification, it needs to assess how serious these risks are. Asking the following questions will help in this process.

- How likely is it that someone will be injured as a result of workplace violence?
- Are the injuries likely to be serious?
- How many people are exposed to the risk?

■ Risk control

Risk control means taking one of the following steps:

Eliminate the hazard

This is the best method for protecting employees and others from the risks of violence. This may be as simple as ensuring that there are no sharp objects in the reception area, or the furniture in the reception area is too heavy to be thrown about.

Replace the hazardous procedure with a less dangerous one

This applies when it is not possible to eliminate the hazard. For example, it would not be practical to have a cashless medical practice. A safer alternative might be to minimise the amount of cash kept on premises by ensuring that banking is done on a regular basis and/or by offering patients the convenience of EFTPOS and credit card payment.

Workplace design and layout

It is possible to remove or reduce risk by improving the design and layout of premises. Effective lighting, the installation of duress alarms, location of counters, desks, computer monitors and the like can all reduce the risks of injury.

Training

Everyone at the practice should be trained in safety policies and procedures. Where people are dealing with high-risk groups, they should receive appropriate training on managing such people and how to deal with situations that may arise.

Training is an ongoing responsibility. The practice should have appropriate induction policies in place and everyone in the practice should be kept up to date with safety policies and procedures on a regular basis.

■ After an incident

The response to an incident will vary according to its severity. In serious cases of violence the practice manager or practice principal(s) should make sure everyone is safe and the appropriate emergency services should be contacted immediately.

Where appropriate, staff, patients and visitors should remain on the premises until the police arrive.

Incidents should be recorded and investigated. Where available, CCTV footage should be reviewed and written statements should be taken.

Where necessary, the practice should offer support (eg, debriefing) to staff. It is important for the practice to ensure that staff are quickly brought up to date with events and given information on what support is available to them. They should also be provided with information on any steps being taken as a result of an incident.

This support should be monitored and reviewed as appropriate.

The practice should ensure that it complies with any obligations under workers' compensation or occupational health safety legislation including injury reporting.



More information

The relevant WorkCover Authority in each State/Territory and various health and safety websites have useful resources to assist employers to reduce the risks of workplace violence.

ACT WorkCover	http://www.workcover.act.gov.au/
WorkCover NSW	http://www.workcover.nsw.gov.au/
NT WorkSafe	http://www.worksafe.nt.gov.au/
WorkCover Queensland	http://www.workcover.qld.gov.au/
Queensland Workplace Health & Safety	http://www.deir.qld.gov.au/workplace/
WorkCover Tasmania	http://www.workcover.tas.gov.au/
Workplace Standards Tasmania	http://www.wst.tas.gov.au/
WorkSafe Victoria	http://www.worksafe.vic.gov.au/
WorkCover SA	http://www.workcover.com/
SafeWork SA	http://www.safework.sa.gov.au/
WorkCover WA	http://www.workcover.wa.gov.au/Default.htm
WorkSafe (WA)	http://www.docep.wa.gov.au/worksafe/

Making your practice a violence free zone

Enclosed with this kit is a poster that can be displayed in waiting rooms highlighting the importance of this issue and making it clear that violent behaviour of any sort will not be tolerated.



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An initiative of the Australian Medical Association

PO Box 6090 Kingston ACT 2604

Ph: 02 6270 5400

Fax: 02 6270 5499

www.ama.com.au

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